

Message Text

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17

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AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

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SUBJ: RAJARATNAM AND K.C. LEE DISCUSS POST-VIETNAM PROSPECTS
AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

1. IN TWO ADDRESSEES DECEMBER 14 TO THE SEMINAR ON POLITICAL
AND ECONOMIC TRENDS IN SINGAPORE SPONSORED BY THE DEMOCRATIC
SOCIALIST CLUB, FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM AND THE SENIOR
MINISTER OF STATE IN MFA, K.C. LEE, DISCUSSED THE PROSPECTS
FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE POST-VIETNAM ERA.

2. RAJARATNAM STRESSED THAT EUROPE AND AMERICA NO LONGER
CONTROLLED EVENTS IN THE REGION AND WERE MORE INTERESTED IN
PROTECTING THEIR GLOBAL INTERESTS THAN THE FATE OF SOUTHEAST
ASIA, AND THAT THIS CHANGED SITUATION HAD USHERED IN AN ERA
OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN POLITICS. RAJARATNAM REFERRED TO PRESIDENT FORD'S
RECENT SPEECH AND AGREED THAT AMERICAN INTEREST IN THE REGION
WOULD PERSIST. HOWEVER, HE SAID THIS INTEREST RELATED TO SAFE-
GUARDING AMERICA'S GLOBAL ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC
INTERESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF GREAT POWER RIVALRY. IF THESE WERE
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NOT IN JEOPARDY THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE IS "IF YOU CANNOT SAVE

YOURSELF, THEN UNCLE SAM WILL NOT SAVE YOU." AS FAR AS JAPAN, THE PRC AND USSR WERE CONCERNED, SEA COUNTRIES WERE JUST SO MANY PIECES IN THE POWER GAME.

3. LOOKING AHEAD RAJARATNAM SAID THAT INTRA-REGIONAL CONFLICTS WOULD PROBABLY BECOME MORE INTENSE AS SEA STATES RAN INTO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES AT HOME, AND THAT THIS COULD POSSIBLY LEAD TO PROXY WARS IF THESE CONFLICTS AFFECTED THE GLOBAL INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS. IF SEA GOVERNMENTS WERE DETERMINED NOT TO FEUD WITH ONE ANOTHER AND DECIDED TO USE THEIR RESOURCES TO BRING ABOUT PEACE AND PROGRESS IN THE AREA IT COULD LEAD TO A "REAL ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY." ALTHOUGH IT WAS POSSIBLE TO AVOID THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF REGIONAL CONFLICT THROUGH COOPERATIVE EFFORTS, AS AN "ENLIGHTENED PESSIMIST" RAJARATNAM FELT SINGAPORE SHOULD PREPARE FOR THE WORST. HE THOUGHT SINGAPORE COULD PROBABLY SURVIVE THE DANGERS IN THE YEARS AHEAD, GIVEN ITS DEMONSTRATED CAPACITY TO SURVIVE PAST CRISES.

4. ON A SOMEWHAT MORE UPBEAT NOTE, K.C. LEE SAID THAT ASEAN HAD DEVELOPED INCREASING COHESION AND A SPIRIT OF FRANK DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE AMONG ITS LEADERS. THE FUTURE DEPENDED ON WHETHER THE FIVE MEMBER STATES COULD PULL THEIR RESOURCES TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT CONCRETE PLANS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION TO RAISE THE STANDARDS OF LIVING OF ITS PEOPLES AND SATISFY THEIR MOUNTING EXPECTATIONS. UNFORTUNATELY ASEAN HAD NOT EVEN TOUCHED THE SURFACE ON ITS GREAT POTENTIAL AND PROGRESS HAD BEEN RATHER SLOW IN THE FIELD OF INTRA-ASEAN TRADE AND INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION. ALTHOUGH HE SUPPORTED A COLLECTIVE REGIONAL EFFORT TO OVERCOME SUBVERSION, HE STRESSED THAT THE ABILITY TO DO SO DEPENDED UPON ASEAN'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH POVERTY, FRUSTRATION, AND POPULAR DISCONTENT. THEREFORE, OVERCOMING INTERNAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH FED INTERNAL SUBVERSION IS PROBABLY MORE URGENT THAN MEETING ANY EXTERNAL THREAT.

5. TEXTS BY POUCH.

6. COMMENT: ABOVE SPEECHES REFLECT GOS CONTINUING BELIEF THAT THE ASEAN STATES MUST RECOGNIZE THE DIFFICULT REALITIES OF THE POST-VIETNAM ERA AND SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP PRAGMATIC UNCLASSIFIED

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APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS. THE GOS CONSIDERS THIS TO BE THE BEST WAY OF DEALING WITH INTERNAL SUBVERSION, AND THINK IT IS LESS LIKELY TO FOUNDER ON THE SHOALS OF POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES THAN MORE ELABORATE PLANS FOR SECURITY COOPERATION. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT RAJARATNAM REFERRED FAVORABLY TO THE POSSIBLE ATTAINMENT OF A "ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY." SINCE THE GOS HAS HERETOFORE BEEN SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE ZONE,

RAJARATNAM'S REMARKS MAY INDICATE THAT THE GOS HAS CONCLUDED THAT IT IS WISER APPROACH TO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT WHILE RE-DEFINING IT IN TERMS WHICH CAN LEAD TO POSITIVE ACTION ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT. HIS REMARKS ALSO ARE INDICATIVE OF A GOS TENDENCY TO BASE POLICY ON A "WORST CASE" ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FACTORS. EVEN IF THE WORST FAILS TO MATERIALIZE, SINGAPORE'S LEADERS BELIEVE THEIR PLANS WILL LEAVE THEM JUST THAT MUCH MORE AHEAD OF THE GAME. HOLDRIDGE

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